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# Women's Power, Women's Justice: Opening Convocation Remarks

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**2016 New Student Convocation**  
**Provost's Welcome**  
**Jonathan D. Green**

It is my privilege to welcome our new students on behalf of the faculty. You chose a great university, and congratulations, a great university chose you. For more than a century and a half, Illinois Wesleyan has uniquely integrated the traditions of a liberal arts college with professional education — first in the fine and performing arts and then in education, business, accounting, and nursing. The early leaders of the university made these distinctive decisions because they recognized the need for liberally educated leaders in professional life.

We need liberally educated citizen leaders more than ever before. Many institutions excel in preparing students to think critically, to write persuasively, and to lead compassionately. This is the collective rhetoric of all premiere liberal-arts colleges: we do these things more effectively than any other sector of higher education. It is not hyperbole; it is irrefutably true, and yet we struggle daily to fend off wave after wave of contrarian media without mention of our most critical asset. We are the where young men and women can best learn to have difficult conversations.

We talk about being educated broadly and deeply. We want you to have a comprehensive appreciation of the breadth of learning, and we will help you to develop the discipline to achieve a rich understanding of a field of learning that must be accumulated and cultivated over time. These experiences are not a goal unto themselves. The breadth and depth of your education at Illinois Wesleyan is intended to prepare you to think across disciplines, cultures, and time to see how the Gordian knots of our greatest social, scientific, and moral challenges might be untied. This is the modern cradle of hope, and it is how we make manifest our mission to: “Afford the greatest possibilities for realizing individual potential while preparing students for democratic citizenship and life in a global society.”

Each year, the faculty and staff identify an intellectual theme that allows our community collectively to learn to have these difficult conversations in a forum of mutual respect with intentional opportunities for reflection and personal development.

As you know, this year's theme is “Women's Power: Women's Justice.” I was disappointed to hear that during pre-orientation some of our male athletes had ridiculed this theme as frivolous and irrelevant, which is exactly why this theme is timely and necessary.

These are nine leading issues affecting women around the world today identified by Global Citizen:

1. Inadequate access to education: According to UNESCO 31 million girls of primary school age are not in school.

2. Inequality in the workforce: In the United States, a nation that regularly declares itself a leader in equity and human rights, women are paid less than men across nearly all employment sectors. In 2015, the differential was 21% even though women began outnumbering men on college campuses in the 1980s, and in 2014 women in the U.S. surpassed men in overall academic achievement.
3. Reproductive health and rights: Worldwide, 225 million women lack family planning resources.
4. Maternal Health: The World Health Organization estimates that nearly 300,000 lives are lost each year from preventable pregnancy-related causes.
5. Gender-based violence: The World Health Organization reports that 1 in 3 women will experience physical or sexual violence.
6. Child Marriage: According to the United Nations Population Fund, during this decade over 140 million girls will become child brides.
7. Female Genital Mutilation: The World Health Organization estimates that over 200 million women and girls have been victims of these practices across 30 nations.
8. Female infanticide: Globally, when left to nature, human beings have an even distribution of men and women through what is known as Fisher's Principle. Women generally live longer, but this is balanced by a slightly higher male birthrate: 107 male births for every 100 female. When the World Bank first collected global population data by gender in 1961, the world population was within 0.09% of gender equilibrium. A gap has continued to grow since that time, so that there are now over 60,000,000 more men than women in the world. Much of this can be attributed to female infanticide in male dominated cultures.
9. Political inequality: 95% of the world's nations have a male head of state. This Friday marks the 96th anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, which finally granted U.S. women the right to vote, and yet, until last month no major party had nominated a woman to be their candidate for president.

I had said these were the leading issues affecting women, but we are all affected. As Dr. King wrote in his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, we are all "caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

"Women's Power: Women's Justice" is justice. As Marie Shear so poignantly wrote, "Feminism is the radical notion that women are people."

I urge each of you to take every occasion this year to use this theme as a springboard for developing your skill at having difficult conversations, the conversations that really matter. This will prepare you to be that difference you wish to see in the world. Learn to become better advocates for your mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, and friends, for those who cannot speak for themselves, and ultimately for yourselves.

This is what it means to realize your greatest individual potential for democratic citizenship and life in a global society. This is what it means to be a Titan.

This summer, you read Jenny Nordberg's *The Underground Girls of Kabul*, which in its exploration of the bacha posh elucidates one of the countless threads in the complex web of "Women's Power: Women's Justice." Ms. Nordberg will be on campus on September 14<sup>th</sup> as the keynote speaker for the President's Convocation.

Incoming students were invited to submit entries for an essay contest about the reading.

- **First Prize:** Invitation for dinner at the President's house with Jenny Nordberg + \$250 IWU Bookstore Gift Card
- **Two Honorable Mention Prizes:** Invitation for dinner at the President's house with Jenny Nordberg + \$100 IWU Bookstore Gift Card

**1st Prize:**

*Differences Between Afghan and American Gender Politics: Subtle Versus Blatant Sexism, and Both Their Dangers* by Mary Amanda Breeden

Ms. Breeden please stand up.

**Honorable Mentions:**

*Global Feminism: A Comparison of Gender Roles in Afghanistan and the United States* by Alexa Letourneau

*Endless Possibilities Await* by Naing Lin Tun

Ms. Letourneau and Ms. Tun